

## Thought Leader's Corner

We received so many responses for last month's question that we couldn't include them all. Here are a few more:

### Q. "What are the IT opportunities and pitfalls for ACOs going forward?"

"The main opportunities for information technology in ACOs come from the ability to comprehensively manage the health of a population using data obtained from all of the healthcare providers for that population. In the current healthcare environment, most providers have a limited picture of the care provided to their patients because they don't have (and may be prohibited by HIPAA from obtaining) access to the claims of other providers, as well as outpatient pharmacy, laboratory and other diagnostic test results, physician notes, quality measures, and other significant data elements that are necessary to develop and follow a comprehensive health care plan for population members. With the comprehensive data set that can be assembled from the participants in an ACO (including the payer in a commercial ACO contract), ACO providers can have the information to manage a population member's care far more comprehensively than under the current provider structure.

The main pitfall of an ACO's IT implementation is the possibility of under-designing and under-resourcing the IT function. ACO data sources, formats, and structures will be significantly different from those found within a hospital's IT department, and the technologies and skills used for managing patient accounting systems and EHR systems are significantly different from those required by an ACO. This difference must be understood and appreciated during the strategic design of the ACO, and the IT function must be equipped with the knowledge and technology to manage these new data sources effectively."



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"As ACOs swim within the river of Don Berwick's Triple Aim, the biggest opportunity is to leverage investment in ACO IT across both Medicare and commercial ACOs and use the technology to also support quality improvement and clinical integration initiatives, patient-centered medical homes, value-based purchasing, and other healthcare delivery reforms. The biggest pitfall to avoid is buying into the "one-stop shop" pitch, the idea that a single solution is all you need for an ACO. It must be emphasized that to operate a successful ACO will require a number of technologies, including electronic medical records, health information exchange, and data analytics."



**Ken Perez**  
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"Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) represent a tremendous step forward to resolve the fragmentation and unfortunate incentive structure that are at the core of our current healthcare ills. Healthcare IT is essential for facilitating the care coordination, quality, and efficiencies of the proposed regulations. And, while EHR adoption is paramount, we must also pay close attention to integration issues and the affordability of the required HIT solutions. ACOs require integration of disparate systems and data on a scale that has rarely been demonstrated thus far. Although Medicare ACOs will be limited in number, other ACO-like entities are sure to appear, and all will require care coordination, registries, decision support, analytics, and reporting tools to achieve compliance and prove effective. Many such solutions already exist as standalone tools. The health IT challenge (and opportunity) will be to weave such tools into existing applications and throughout the fabric of the daily workflow of healthcare personnel and consumers – without disruption. However, systems integration without data standardization is sub-optimal. Therefore, healthcare IT vendors should seize the moment to quickly adopt and implement standards, such as ICD-10, SNOMED, LOINC, and others. Only by such tight integration and data normalization can the ACO initiative maximize its impact. Furthermore, if such functionality can be delivered in a cost-efficient manner – not only for large institutions, but also in a way that is affordable by individual physicians – then the ACO initiative may have an even broader impact on healthcare than was originally foreseen."



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